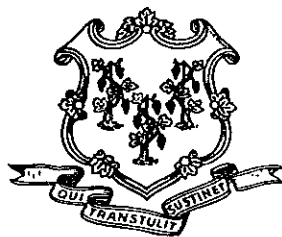




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Testimony before the Education Committee

In Support of Proposed Senate Bill 424: An Act Concerning Access to Preschool Programs for Children in the Care and Custody of the Department of Children and Families

March 12, 2014

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Proposed Senate Bill 424, ***AN ACT CONCERNING ACCESS TO PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES***. With this critically important bill, Connecticut would become the first state in the nation to guarantee preschool admission and attendance to the children in our state who arguably need the benefits of preschool the most – our 3 to 5 year olds who, because they have been abused or neglected, have been removed from their homes and committed to the care of the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Under the bill, only upon a documented finding by DCF that preschool attendance would not be in such a child's best interests will the child not be required to be enrolled into a high quality preschool program.

The benefits of a high quality preschool education to the children involved are by now well established. The Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance recently pointed out several studies from across the nation that well illustrate these benefits. Chicago children who attended a preschool program were 29% more likely to graduate from high school than their peers who did not attend. Among those Chicago children, those that attended preschool were 41% less likely to require special education services. Maryland fifth graders who attended preschool were 44% less likely to have repeated a grade than their peers. Other studies have shown that these benefits carry on to adulthood, in profoundly significant ways. Chicago children who did not attend preschool were 70% more likely to be arrested for violent crime by age 18 than their peers that had attended. North Carolina children who attended preschool were less likely to become teen parents than their peers who did not attend. Forty year old adults in Michigan who had attended preschool were more likely to be employed, and had a 33% higher income than their peers who did not attend.¹

It is because of these kinds of life changing, real world benefits that preschool is such an amazingly sound investment for government to make in its citizenry. Investments in preschool education have been found to bring back a sevenfold return – every dollar invested leads to a benefit of \$7 to the body politic. One study, carried out over 40 years, showed an even greater

¹ "Benefits of Early Childhood Education", Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance (2011).

benefit: for the approximately \$15,000 that was invested in each child for high quality preschool, the total monetary benefit back to society as a whole was over \$195,000, in the form of education savings, crime savings, welfare savings and increased tax revenues.²

When it comes to the young children who are the subject of Senate Bill 424 -- those who have been abused and neglected to the extent that they have been legally removed from their homes by DCF and taken into the custody and care of DCF and the State of Connecticut -- common sense dictates that these children would benefit even more than the average Connecticut child from attending a high quality preschool program. When one considers the unimaginable toll taken on these young children by the abuse and neglect that they have suffered, and that led to their entry into foster care, it becomes even more urgent that they receive the nurturing social and intellectual support that comes with attending a high quality preschool program. I strongly believe that these children need, and must be given, all the benefits we can provide for them. An indispensable part of nurturing these children is to get them enrolled into a high quality preschool program, immediately upon coming into DCF care, unless there's some unique, documented reason that such enrollment and attendance would not be in their best interests.

I look forward to working with the chairs and members of this committee on this piece of legislation that I believe could prove so beneficial to the several hundred children who are, at any given time, in the care and custody of DCF and the State of Connecticut. Thank you.

² "Lifetime Effects: The HighScope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40, HighScope (2005).